

Regional Broadband Planning Team Meeting Minutes

Region 6 – March 2, 2011, 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Region 6 Planning Team (attendees are indicated in **bold**)

Ryan Bekkum, Couleecap, Inc.

Jerry Bloom, Oakdale Electric Cooperative

Dan Braund, CenturyLink

Greg Flogstad, Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission

Rochelle Hartman, La Crosse Public Library

Dennis Lawrence, North Central Regional Planning Commission

Pat Peterson, Vernon County Unit on Aging

Joan Pierce for Bruce Mathew, Western Wisconsin Technical College

Tim Rehbein, Vernon County - UW Extension. Interest in broadband is in the agriculture world related to producers of cash grains doing their own market information and livestock producers using broadband for marketing information

Deb Rislow, Gundersen Lutheran

Frank Servais, Alliance Bank

Dave Spencer, Airborne Internet

Terry Whipple, Juneau County Economic Development Corporation (JCEDC)

Ken Witt, Sparta

Charles Ashbeck, West Salem. Personal and professional interests in broadband for multitude of reasons for community squad dispatch, training in office held online and video, personal amusement at home.

Members of the Public

Brian Law, Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission

PSC and LinkWISCONSIN Team

Christopher Larson, PSC

Judy Klug, PSC

Bill Gillis, LinkWISCONSIN

A. Welcome and agenda review – Judy Klug

Judy Klug – These meetings are considered open meetings of state government. Discussion of this group's business among groups that constitute a quorum should not occur outside of these meetings. Judy demonstrated the online broadband maps.

Rochelle - State recently returned broadband grant for schools and libraries. How does that program fit in with this group and why was it returned?

Judy Klug – That was a very specific fiber project to connect libraries. This LinkWISCONSIN project is a separate grant for planning. The legislative committee that rejected the library grant was concerned with cost and the impact it would have.

Dan Braund – The NTIA requirements were too restrictive. Individual telcos will accomplish the same bandwidth thru BadgerNet.

B. Brief review of broadband investment planning objectives – Bill Gillis

Bill Gillis – Part of this project is collecting data on where gaps are and then these teams need to identify what should be the focus of improving access and use in this region. This team should address the questions of where should we go and what should we do?

LinkWisconsin has divided the state into 9 regions for planning purposes. Every region is different. Expanding broadband involves an investment of time and money. Companies like CenturyLink must make a business case to corporate leaders for capital budgets. To do this, companies need information on where priorities and opportunities are in the region. But it's not just private companies making investment decisions. Libraries, schools, private businesses, and public safety organizations all make investments in equipment, programming, and time related to broadband.

What we want to get out of this group is a business plan that will produce realistic results. We don't just want a pile of data. If a plan has information showing the market and expected return, it has a good chance of getting funded. There is a lot of need for more speed, availability, and more widespread use of broadband for various purposes. But we can't build a plan around everything – we must develop a focus and know where to start. The hardest tasks for this group will be determining what are the regional priorities, where do we start, and defining project that has best chance to advance broadband. In making these decisions, we should focus on whether the project is realistic, is there a funding stream, will the project build on regional needs, and will that project provide a base for other projects to build off of?

C. Review priorities criteria and examples – Bill Gillis

D. Brainstorm regional broadband priorities – Bill Gillis

We want you to break into groups of two and talk about from your perspective, if broadband were more available, what benefit would there be? For example, would we like to have more people come to libraries to do tax returns, provide more education in community, more teleworking from home, advance public safety by improving emergency response?

See separate list of priorities resulting from the brainstorming session. Additional discussion included:

Frank Servais – It is expensive to send people offsite for training. Broadband could potentially offer a more cost effective solution, but Buffalo County has only 16,000 people, which is not enough to be

cost effective for broadband providers to invest in. He pays 6 times what Western Wisconsin Technical College pays for T1 service.

Bill Gillis - There are some good online resources for internet safety.

Brian Law? – Broadband availability is a key for recruiting businesses to region. For example, a bus company needed broadband for mechanics to show a part supplier what part is needed. Another example is redundancy of data centers.

Bill Gillis – Broadband can also be used for monitoring homes for security, energy use, letting the dog out, etc.

Ken W – Broadband needs to be reasonably priced to be of value in filling gaps in the region.

? – - Is wireless the most effective way to expand broadband? I notice on the consumer survey results that there are a lot of people in our region obtaining broadband from municipalities, as compared to the rest of the state. Ideally, broadband could be provided directly by the municipality on an affordable basis, but this may not be feasible in all areas.

Judy Klug – Reedsburg has been successful and profitable in its phone and broadband business, but other munis have not.

Rochelle Hartman – I have heard talk about universal service access being switched from phone to broadband.

Judy Klug – Yes, there is a proposal in the talking stages at Federal level.

Charles Ashbeck - There is a statewide interoperability planning effort underway, but it is facing some challenges.

E. Priorities project discussion – Bill Gillis

The next step is we need to start fine tuning a project by identifying a business investment priority. You can go online to <http://www.link.wisconsin.gov/lwi/default.aspx?page=52#Teams> and see what other regions have come up with. For example, Region 5 in Northeast Wisconsin is doing a phased approach by first identifying underserved areas, which they define as not having 1.5 MB speed for \$40 or less per month. Then they plan to form local leadership group to address gaps. Region 7 in Southwest Wisconsin is focusing on a programmatic initiative to improve access to seniors

As we decide on a priority we should keep in mind: is the project realistic and doable, who needs to be engaged, where is leadership going to come from, how will we know it will be successful, and will the priority build on an existing asset in the region?

Groups reported their initial ideas for project nominations as follows:

1. Need to educate members of public who are skeptical about what broadband can do. It's not just for entertainment. Should design an outreach program to convince people unwilling or unable to use internet of its value.

Rochelle and Brian will work together on writing up this priority nomination.

2. It's important to get folks access to base broadband. The benefits can include travel savings, reducing carbon footprints, etc. We need detailed studies for where needs are. Some areas have 6 or 7 providers, some none. We could recruit Badgernet or other leaders to help.

The FCC recently mandated narrowbanding in 2013, which may involve selling off frequency to companies, and result in bringing new technologies or services to areas. Concerned with brain drain because region doesn't have infrastructure or jobs grads are interested in. Emphasize education to underserved areas.

To summarize, the project would involve doing research to find out where the needs really are, then focusing on areas where access is not available at an affordable price. Then we would work with area providers. Joan will write up this project nomination.

3. The cost to provide broadband access to everyone is prohibitive, so we should have a central location for people to come to. We already have this in libraries. We should redefine libraries to include computer labs. The Bill Gates foundation gives out grants to improve computer usage. This may not be realistic due to proposed budget cuts for libraries.

Schools were mentioned as an alternative resource for public computing. The FCC just changed its rules to allow schools to stay open for public computing access. Schools filter the access pretty heavily, however. Extension offices were also discussed for public access? There may be multiple places to explore for public computing access. Ken will write up this project nomination.

F. Next steps and schedule of future meetings – Chris Larson

Please write up nominations, including any you think of that weren't discussed today, by March 23. They should include enough detail to have a good phone discussion. Then we will decide which one we can turn into a project focus, or possibly combine ideas from different nominations. Then we will build into a planning focus and summary. When we are done, a statewide plan will be developed, consisting of series of 9 plans and possibly the addition of a statewide focus. We will send out an email via "Doodle.com" to ask your availability for the next conference call, likely in early to mid-April.